



## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### Notice of Intent to Prepare a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Coral Reef Conservation Program and to Solicit Public Input

**AGENCY:** Office for Coastal Management, National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of intent; request for written comments.

**SUMMARY:** NOAA announces its intent to prepare a supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for its Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP). The CRCP conducts and funds activities throughout parts of the United States, including Florida, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa. The CRCP funds monitoring activities and occasional research within the Gulf of America and the U.S. Pacific Remote Island Area, and provides technical support and capacity-building in targeted international regions, including the wider Caribbean, Micronesia, and the Coral Triangle. The supplemental PEIS will address the environmental impacts of new coral reef conservation and restoration activities and expanded methods to be conducted by the CRCP.

**DATES:** Written comments must be received at the appropriate address (see

**ADDRESSES)** on or before **[INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]**.

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit comments on this notice by either of the following methods:

- Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: Go to <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NOS-2026-1618>. Click the “Comment Now!” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.
- Mail: Please direct written comments to Liz Fairey ([liz.fairey@noaa.gov](mailto:liz.fairey@noaa.gov)), NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.

All relevant comments received are part of the public record. Comments that are not related to the supplemental PEIS for the CRCP, or that contain profanity, vulgarity, threats, or other inappropriate language will not be considered. NOAA will accept anonymous comments (enter N/A in the required fields to remain anonymous). All personally identifiable information, (e.g., name, address) submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Liz Fairey, NOAA’s Office of Habitat Conservation, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910, [liz.fairey@noaa.gov](mailto:liz.fairey@noaa.gov), (301) 427-8632.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** CRCP supports activities that are funded and carried out under the Coral Reef Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 6401 et seq) to protect, conserve, and restore the nation’s coral reefs by maintaining healthy ecosystem functions while promoting the wise management and sustainable use to benefit local communities and the nation. In July 2020, NOAA published the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program’s Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS; [coast.noaa.gov/data/docs/compliance/crcp-feis.pdf](https://coast.noaa.gov/data/docs/compliance/crcp-feis.pdf)). The PEIS assesses a suite of potential environmental impacts of NOAA-funded coral reef conservation and restoration activities implemented through its existing framework for implementing the CRCP, which is consistent with obligations under the Coral Reef Conservation Act. The PEIS

has been reevaluated and continues to be valid for the activities described within, but new activities and expanded methods are being implemented due to advances in science, changes in restoration methods, and changes in circumstances. Therefore, NOAA will draft a supplemental PEIS to assess the environmental impacts of these new and expanded activities.

NOAA continues to implement the CRCP across four of its line offices (National Ocean Service, Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, National Marine Fisheries Service, and National Environmental Satellite Data Information Service) and in coordination with other Federal agencies, state and local agencies, private conservation organizations, and research and academic institutions. The CRCP supports research and monitoring to gather data on the existence and condition of coral reef ecosystems to support conservation, management, and restoration efforts. The CRCP also supports coral and watershed restoration activities, along with other activities to reduce physical impacts to coral reefs. The projects implemented or funded under the CRCP vary in terms of their size, complexity, geographic location, and level of Federal involvement; they often benefit diverse coral species, habitats, and ecosystem types. A significant amount of this support is administered through grants and cooperative agreements. The CRCP prioritizes activities based on available funding and the responsiveness of priorities to the National Coral Reef Resilience Strategy as well as jurisdictional needs.

In the supplemental PEIS, CRCP will include new actions and expanded methods that incorporate the latest scientific advances and new solutions needed to respond to shifting ocean conditions and emerging threats, such as coral disease and invasive species. Thus, these new activities undertaken and funded by the CRCP, and their potential effects on the environment, will be analyzed in the supplemental PEIS. These activities include:

- Expanding coral collection activities to include the collection of whole coral colonies for use in research activities; for coral nursery broodstock and restoration

activities; for rescue during disease outbreaks and thermal events; and for preservation in gene banks.

- Expanding coral nursery activities to include more support for ex-situ/land-based coral nurseries including expansion, maintenance, and herbivore co-culturing.
- Expanding coral restoration activities to include larger restoration areas approximately the size of two basketball courts (1,000 m<sup>2</sup> or 3,280 ft<sup>2</sup>), to incorporate broader application of selectively bred (e.g., assisted gene flow to improve genetic diversity) or preconditioned corals (e.g., stress hardening to improve resistance to ocean conditions); and to add additional site preparation techniques, such as stabilization of loose coral and rubble and installing three-dimensional structures to improve survival of outplanted corals.
- Expanding ecosystem intervention activities to include the propagation and release of additional herbivores (e.g., fish and snails) for algae control; additional methods to manage unwanted invasive and nuisance species (e.g., soft corals); and activities to increase coral larval settlement (e.g., playing natural sounds on reefs).
- Expanding activities to address temporary shifts in ocean conditions (e.g., thermal events and disease outbreaks) by the temporary evacuation of corals to ex-situ facilities; moving coral nurseries to deeper, cooler waters; shading of priority corals; and in-situ coral feeding.
- Expanding watershed restoration activities to include in-situ mangrove nursery operations and restoration.

The evaluation within the original PEIS based on a broad range of potential impacts that could result from implementation of all activities, rather than a site-specific analysis. The actual environmental effects are evaluated by tiered site-specific, project-level review. In preparing the supplemental PEIS, NOAA will continue to use the tiered environmental

decision-making framework established in the original PEIS to ensure compliance with other statutes protecting natural resources.

## **Alternatives**

NOAA will analyze four program-level alternatives:

- **No-Action Alternative:** This reflects the "status quo" operations of the CRCP as described in the original PEIS, without the implementation of the new actions and expanded methods mentioned above.
- **Alternative One:** This alternative reflects the continued operation of the CRCP, but would eliminate in-water activities that restore viable coral populations (e.g., in-water coral restoration and intervention techniques) and the activities that reduce physical impacts to coral reefs (e.g., marine debris removal and installation of buoys).
- **Alternative Two:** This alternative continues the operation of the CRCP, including the in-water coral restoration and intervention activities and reduction of physical impacts to coral reef ecosystems that support restoring viable coral populations (i.e., the no-action alternative), and requires the implementation of discretionary conservation and mitigation measures. This alternative would include the new actions and expanded methods mentioned above.
- **Alternative Three:** This is the agency's preferred alternative, which reflects the "status quo" operations of the CRCP as described in the original PEIS, with the addition of the new actions and expanded methods mentioned above.

## **Public Comment**

We begin this NEPA process by soliciting input from the public and interested parties on environmental impacts and relevant information, studies, or analyses with respect to the CRCP's new and expanded activities to be considered in the

supplemental PEIS. Specifically, this scoping process is intended to accomplish the following objectives:

- Invite affected Federal, State, and local agencies, as well as other interested persons, to participate in the supplemental PEIS process.
- Identify potential significant environmental impacts, issues, or substantial new circumstances to be analyzed in the supplemental PEIS.
- Identify and eliminate issues determined to be insignificant or addressed in other documents.
- Identify related environmental documents being prepared.
- Identify other environmental review and consultation requirements.

The official scoping period starts on **[INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]**. Please visit the NOAA CRCP webpage for additional information regarding the program: <https://coralreef.noaa.gov/>.

**Authority:** The preparation of the supplemental PEIS for NOAA's CRCP will be conducted in accordance with the requirements of NEPA and NOAA's policies and procedures for compliance with NEPA.

**Nicole R. LeBoeuf,**

*Assistant Administrator for Ocean Services and Coastal Zone Management,*

*National Ocean Service,*

*National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.*

[FR Doc. 2026-09969 Filed: 5/18/2026 8:45 am; Publication Date: 5/19/2026]